

THE RESPONSIVENESS OF BLACK FULTON  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TO BLACK  
CONCERNS IN FULTON COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

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The Responsiveness of Black Fulton County Commissioners to  
Black Concerns in Fulton County

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Blacks have held three of the seven positions on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners since 1979. In 1986, that number was increased to five. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not black residents of Fulton County feel that the black commissioners are more responsive to their needs than the white commissioners who were a majority before 1986.

The significance of this study is that it will add to the existing literature on the responsiveness of black elected officials in the U.S. as a whole and the south in particular. The study will add to the ongoing debate about the role of black elected officials in the deliverability of services to their black constituents.

The five black County Commissioners were interviewed to see how responsive they feel they have been to black citizens. A total of 100 black residents of the

southern part of the county were surveyed to determine their perceptions of service delivery since blacks gained a majority on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners.

The major finding of this study was that 94 percent of the respondents surveyed felt that the black commissioners are more responsive to their needs.

The main sources of information for this study were obtained from interviews, books, journals, newspapers and magazines.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Constitution provides that all citizens must have equal, fair, effective and adequate representation in the political process. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states that no state shall deny any person the equal protection of the law. The Fifteenth Amendment gives every U.S. citizen the right to vote and participate in the political process.<sup>1</sup> Today, blacks view political participation as an immensely significant symbol of progress towards full equality. Blacks focus on the right to participate in the U.S. political process for the following reasons. First, participation is important over and above the fact that it is valued for its own sake. Through political participation, blacks tell the government what it is that they want, what policies they want the government to pursue and how they want the resources to be allocated. They do this by voting for candidates who they think will satisfy their desires, by offering or withholding campaign contributions, and by strongly asserting their

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Prewitt and Sidney Verba, An Introduction to American Government, Political Participation and Its Importance (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), pp. 169-170.

views to public officials. Secondly, because black subordination and exploitation were reflected and facilitated by their exclusion from the political process, blacks today view political participation as something very crucial to their lives. Finally, in a democracy where citizens are supposed to rule, those who do not participate are in some sense not fully citizens. Thus, for blacks, political participation is manifested in a number of activities which include campaigning, electing candidates who will respond to their needs, contributions to political organizations and voting. Since most of these activities require a substantial degree of effort, the major focus is on how black elected officials respond to black needs or concerns. Thus, this study focuses on one of the several modes of political participation, in particular, the holding of public office.

The responsiveness of black Fulton County Commissioners to black concerns in Fulton County was chosen for study because presently blacks hold five of the seven seats on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. Responsiveness in this sense is the degree to which black residents of the county feel that black Fulton County Commissioners satisfy their preferences and demands.<sup>2</sup> In 1962, prior to the Voting Rights Act, there were only 1.6 million blacks registered to

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<sup>2</sup>Brian Sherman and K. Farouk Brimah, The Responsiveness of Southern Black Political Leaders to Black Concerns (Atlanta: Voter Education Press, 1984), pp. 1-2.

vote and seventy-two black elected officials in the south. The number of blacks registered to vote represented less than 10 percent of the black eligible voters, and the seventy-two elected officials represented less than one hundredth of a percent of total elected officials in the region.<sup>3</sup> However, in 1966, one year after the Voting Rights Act was passed, black voter registration had increased substantially from 1.6 million to 2.7 million. Between 1965 and 1986, black elected officials have increased in number from seventy-two to over three thousand.

The increase in both representation and registration was due to the perception by blacks that political participation and representation was a necessary process towards full equality, and a vehicle through which they could influence political decisions that impact upon their lives.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the problem addressed in this study is whether or not the increase in representation of blacks on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners has resulted in a perceived increase in the responsiveness to black citizen concerns in the county.

Fulton County, Georgia, is one of the major southern jurisdictions that has always had a substantial black

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<sup>3</sup>Voter Education Project, Inc., Barriers to Effective Participation in Electoral Politics (Atlanta: Voter Education Press, 1981), pp. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup>Voter Education Project, Inc., Black Voter Participation in the South (Atlanta: Voter Education Press, 1950-1984), p. 24.

population. Blacks make up more than 51 percent of the population. Blacks in Fulton County have been active in the formal institutional policies since Reconstruction. The area covered by Fulton County includes the municipalities of Atlanta, Alpharetta, College Park, East Point, Fairburn, Hapeville, Mountain Park, Palmetto, Roswell and Union City. The county is governed by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. In all, there are seven county commissioners - three are elected at-large and four are elected through district representation. There are also unincorporated areas governed by the Fulton County Commission. Residents who live in these areas receive full county services. More blacks live in the southern portion of the county.

The members of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners are Michael Lomax, Chairman, District 2 at-large (black); Reginald Eaves, District 5 (black);<sup>5</sup> Chuck Williams, District 6 (black);<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther King III, District 1 at-large (black); Michael Hightower, District 7 (black); Tom Lowe, Vice Chairman, District 4 (white); and Lee J.

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<sup>5</sup>By the summer of 1988, Reginald Eaves was sentenced to jail for soliciting and accepting bribes from undercover FBI agents in return for a favorable vote on zoning decisions. He was replaced by Gordon L. Joyner who is also black.

<sup>6</sup>By the summer of 1988, Chuck Williams was sentenced to jail for soliciting and accepting bribes from undercover FBI agents in return for a favorable vote on zoning decisions. He was replaced by Nancy A. Boxill who is also black.

Roach, District 3 at-large (white). At-large election means that every registered voter in the county can vote for the candidates, while district election means that those who vote must live within a specified geographical boundary. All of the black commissioners received more than 75 percent of their votes from the black population. A bill is passed by the Commission when four members vote for it.

Blacks running for public office in Fulton County and for national office have resorted to campaign promises and pronouncements that addressed the provision of previously denied services to the black community. In many of the campaigns, housing, police protection, fire protection, garbage collection, employment, welfare programs, hospitals, business permits, and education have been the key areas that the black candidates have utilized to get blacks out to vote.<sup>7</sup>

One of two alternatives will be suggested based on the findings of this study:

1. If the study shows that the commissioners are responsive, the black electorate will be advised to increase their voting power by registering to vote. This will help to elect more blacks to public office.
2. On the other hand, if the study shows that black commissioners are not responsive, the

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<sup>7</sup>Richard Hamilton, "Incentives and Voter Participation," Political Science Quarterly 94 (Spring 1979):136-137.

system of mobilizing a professional consultancy to scrutinize blacks running for public offices will be suggested in order to ensure that those who are nominated to run for public offices are the more capable ones who will be able to influence decisions.

This latter policy was suggested by Walter Fauntroy, Chairman, Black Congressional Caucus, and supported by Roger Wilkins, a member of the District of Columbia non-voting delegation to the House of Representatives.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the relationship between political representation and the distribution of benefits by the governing body is not simple or direct. It is extremely difficult to measure or document, because the most common form of political representation usually allows little more than the expression of support for or opposition to broad policy positions or individual incumbents, and does not permit the expression of specific interest. Moreover, decisions affecting government policies are often those of competing demands. Each group puts pressure on its area of preferences and therefore makes it difficult to visualize the impact of a specific demand on the enactment of the final decision.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Roger Wilkins, "Black Leaders and Needs," New York Times, 28 September 1981, p. 9A.

<sup>9</sup>George Antunes and Charles M. Gaitz, "Ethnicity and Participation: A Study of Mexican Americans, Blacks and Whites," American Journal of Sociology (September 1980): 1192-1193.

## II. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Agency and Unit Description

The writer was an intern at the Voter Education Project, Inc. (VEP) under the supervision of Dr. K. Farouk Brimah, the Research Director, from December 1986 to February 1987. This organization was created in 1962 as a special project of the Southern Regional Council and it is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. In 1970, VEP became an independent entity. VEP is responsible for encouraging and conducting voter registration and education activities in eleven southern states. The states covered by VEP's activities include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. One of the major methods used by VEP to monitor black political activity is through the periodic analysis of the number of black elected officials. Of particular interest is the number of blacks holding elective office in those counties where they constitute a majority of the population. VEP also provides information on public policy issues, organizes workshops and conferences, and provides information to voters regarding the political process.



### Internship Experience

The author participated in all phases and functions of the VEP during the internship. Duties included collection of data needed for the effective functioning of the organization, tabulation of figures, delivery of urgent letters within the city, and helping in the analysis of the 1986 congressional elections in the eleven southern states. The writer also attended various meetings that affect the organization, and interacted extensively with the Fulton County commissioners. The internship widened the writer's understanding of black participation and representation in the U.S. political process, and the principles of public policy.

### Definition of the Problem

Today, there are over three thousand black elected officials in the United States. In Fulton County, which is one of the 159 counties in the State of Georgia, blacks hold five of the seven seats on the commission.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the problem addressed in this study is to determine whether or not black residents of Fulton County feel that black commissioners are more responsive to their needs than the white commissioners who were a majority before 1986. The working

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<sup>10</sup>Voter Education Project, Inc., Black Voter Participation in the South, p. 18.

hypothesis of this study is that the majority of black voters in Fulton County feel that black county commissioners have been more responsive to their needs.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature on the responsiveness of black elected officials in the south advances two conflicting views. One group of authors emphasize that black elected officials are not capable of delivering payoffs to their black constituents, while another group of authors write that black officeholders are capable of delivering payoffs.

According to Adolph Reed, black leaders, either electoral or protest types, are less able and less capable of generating programmatic responses adequate to the needs of their generalized black constituencies, simply because black leadership has embraced coalition politics along with labor unions, Jews, and southern whites in a broader consensus politics endemic to the pluralistic nature of American politics. Reed, who utilized a content analytical approach in his study, presented two questions which he stated remained unanswered:

1. What factors could be used to determine the legitimacy of the claims made by the black elected officials who said they are able to deliver payoffs?
2. How could the black elected officials demonstrate the more fundamental

problems of which those claims were emblematic?<sup>11</sup>

In concluding his study, Reed stated that the claims made by the black elected officials on the deliverability of services appear to hold in theory and not in practice.

Bawden and Palmer, after reviewing and assessing Reagan's "program for recovery," the main purpose of which was to cut down appropriations (for some of the government services), stated that such reduction punctuates the essential powerlessness of black leadership at all levels of government. Their review and assessment of the said program also reveals that between January 1981 and the summer of 1984, white long-term unemployment increased by 1.5 percent, while black long-term unemployment increased by 72 percent. Bawden and Palmer further reveal that Reagan's program for recovery was aimed at reducing the following programs with disproportionately black constituencies by the following percentages.

1. Public service employment by 100 percent,
2. Aid to families with dependent children by 28 percent,
3. Employment and training by 43.9 percent,
4. Food stamps by 51.7 percent,

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<sup>11</sup>Adolph L. Reed, The Crisis in Afro-American Politics: The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 61-62.

5. Financial aid for needy students by 68.9 percent, and
6. Work incentive program by 100 percent.

According to Bawden and Palmer, these findings transmit an unambiguous message that entrenched black elected officials have little clout in influencing decisions and this ultimately undermines their capacity to deliver.<sup>12</sup>

On the same issue of service delivery, Paul Patterson conducted a survey to determine the level of satisfaction among black citizens on the deliverability of services by black elected officials in Chicago. In the survey, 300 black electorates were randomly selected and interviewed in order to determine their perception of black elected officials on the deliverability of services. The survey shows that the inability of black elected officials to respond effectively to deteriorating conditions raises the possibility of constituent disaffection. This exposes black elected officials to vulnerable challenges from below in the black community. Patterson then identified three factors which made black elected officials exhibit signs of failure:

1. The collapse of the democratic growth coalition in which the systematic

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<sup>12</sup>Lee Bawden and John Palmer, "Social Policy: Challenging the Welfare State," The Reagan Record: An Assessment of America's Changing Domestic Priorities, eds. J. L. Palmer and Isabel Sawhill (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1984), p. 185.

linkages of Afro-American politics are embedded.

2. The aggressively anti-black stance of Reaganism.
3. The widening economic gap separating components of the black community.<sup>13</sup>

Patterson stated that because of the above mentioned weaknesses, the idea of incorporating black leadership into the channels of policy formulation, negotiation, and policy implementation becomes a mixed blessing as long as their operation in those channels require internalization of the nondistributive rules. The appropriate question Patterson advanced at this point was, where do the black elected officials fit in the policy negotiation process?<sup>14</sup>

Robert Dahl, in response to this question, stated that the conception of power which translates into black political representation presents some methodological problems. The major difficulty lies in the fact that inasmuch as the parties to be influenced will likely differ from issue to issue and as a matter of consequence, so would the relevant basis of potential power; each issue would have an independent power calculus. Thus, the actual power exercised by the black elected officials would be reflected in the extent to which the white target groups supported

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<sup>13</sup>Paul Patterson, City Limits (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 179-180.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.

policy alternatives consistent with black goals. Black political power would not be discussed in terms of "moderation, good race relations," and so on, but rather, in terms of the enactment of specific policy choices.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, Fulton County has been described as a potential Mecca for black people because of a black majority population, and an increase in the number of blacks in public office. Such a notion leads one to the conclusion that black Fulton County residents can achieve their political, social and economic goals. However, James Wilson, after interviewing some Fulton County residents, disputed such a hypothesis. He stated that by simply listing the number of black elected officials and suggesting that they automatically demonstrate a certain level of power is misleading since much of the literature on black politics tends to emphasize aggregates of black elected officials as an indicator of the level of power and delivery of service.<sup>16</sup>

Mack Jones points out, however, after his study of black officeholders in local government in the south, that:

Political participation and representation, holding public office, favorable population distribution, economic wealth and so on may be sources of power, but that they are only potential sources

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<sup>15</sup>Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," Behavioral Science (July 1985):202-203.

<sup>16</sup>James A. Wilson, "The Negro in Politics," Political Science Review 35 (September 1980):310.

of power. In themselves, they are passive and inert.. They may be converted into real power to bear upon a party who must be persuaded to act in a given way. Thus, voting in itself is not power; having a black majority in itself is not power; nor is having black elected and appointed officials power. These sources become power only when appropriate means are available for harnessing and bringing them to bear upon the behavior of other actors - principally white individuals and groups.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, authors who stated that black elected officials are responsive to their black constituents present another view. For example, Ronald Walters and Robert Smith conclude that the rise in black officeholding has regularized black political representation which leads to a set of concrete systematic avenues for the expression and realization of black concerns. These authors utilized a content analytical approach in their study and saw the newly opened electoral channels as a natural outgrowth for blacks to achieve their goals in the political process.<sup>18</sup>

A related study was also conducted by Martin Kilson. Kilson reviewed the number of black elected officials in the south and merged it with their achievements. The data reveal that the number of black elected officials in the south has attained a higher level that could sustain formal

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<sup>17</sup>Mack H. Jones, "Black Officeholders in Local Government of the South," Political Science Review 75 (October 1971):20.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald Walters and Robert Smith, "The Black Politician, Fulfilling the Legacy of Black Power," Current History 67 (November 1974):200.



political linkage institutions - Congressional Black Caucus, National Conference of Black Mayors, and so on--that solidify black integration into the local policy process. This new development, according to Kilson, has altered the strategic basis of black political activity which enables political officials to have primary responsibility for converting black concerns into legitimate policy agenda items.<sup>19</sup>

In a review of black voting power at the local government level in the south, and the blacks holding public office and how they influence public policy choices consistent with black needs, Milton D. Morris concluded that:

1. Blacks holding elective office have had considerable significant roles in influencing decisions that affect the distribution of vital services to blacks.
2. Recently, there had been a sharp increase in the number of black elected officials and this is linked to the growth and size of the black electorate.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in concluding his study, Milton Morris says that life has changed for better for the black man, as opposed to those days when there were no black

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Kilson, The New Black Political Class (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Milton D. Morris, The Politics of Black America (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 157-158.

representatives at all levels of government.<sup>21</sup>

Studies by Denise Stockton have shown that blacks do not vote in large numbers when incentives are lacking, but they do when the issue matters to them. For blacks in the south, due representation brings positive changes towards equal justice as well as social equality. In this regard, it has been contended that as black elected officials increase, inadequate justice and lack of services decrease.<sup>22</sup>

All of the major studies of the relationship between black representation and the distribution of public services suggest that black representation does indeed make a difference. The most extensive examination of this relationship was done by William Keech based on case studies of Tuskegee, Alabama and Durham, North Carolina. Keech found that black representation brought about changes in the distribution of public services, including garbage collection, street paving, recreational facilities, medical facilities, welfare programs, fire stations, employment, and elimination of some forms of discrimination. Blacks were also appointed to boards and commissions by black elected officials.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Denise Stockton, Black Elected Officials and their Constituencies (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>William Keech, The Impact of Negro Voting: The Role of the Vote in the Quest for Equality (Skokie, IL: Rand McNally, 1968), pp. 105-106.

In another study of the distribution of services in Chicago, four broad areas of service delivery were examined to determine what factors influenced distributional decisions. The study reported the effects of black elected officials on some of these distributional decisions. The data strongly suggested that black local officials respond to black demands and protests by providing black neighborhoods with a greater share of available resources. Black wards primarily gained swimming pools, athletic fields, hospitals and playgrounds. In general, the study concluded that the distribution of benefit was not as a result of rational political decisions, but as a result of the influence of black elected officials.<sup>24</sup> Jobs are among the most obvious and measurable benefits for blacks. Therefore, jobs as political rewards remain a special concern for blacks.<sup>25</sup>

In his classic examination of blacks in Chicago politics, Harold Gosnell's discussion of the effect of black elected officials centered mainly on the employment benefit that resulted from black support of the city's political machine. In this discussion, Gosnell concluded that black participation and representation in politics has brought

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<sup>24</sup>Kenneth Mladenka, "The Urban Bureaucracy and the Chicago Political Machine: Who Gets What and Limits to Political Control," American Political Science Review, Vol. 74, No. 2 (December 1980):991-992.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 995.

more desirable jobs to blacks. Harold Gosnell further stated that jobs such as those in the postal agencies were the result of the specific pressures exerted by black elected officials.<sup>26</sup>

A report in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution quoted Michael Lomax (Chairman of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners) as saying that Fulton County employs more aides than do other metro counties. This is to ensure that commissioners attend to the needs of their constituents more effectively, the report concluded.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit stated that the responsiveness of black elected officials is encouraging and worthy of mention.<sup>28</sup>

The writer agrees with those authors who stated that black elected officials are capable of delivering payoffs to their black constituents. The major reason for agreeing with those authors is that the rise in black officeholding has led to a set of concrete and systematic avenues for the expression and realization of black concerns; for example, employment and medical services.

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<sup>26</sup>Harold Gosnell, Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 365-366.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Lomax, cited in The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 10 October 1984, p. 11A.

<sup>28</sup>Coleman Young, cited in The Washington Post, 29 April 1984, p. 13D.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

##### Data Collection

Primary and secondary data collection techniques were utilized to gather relevant data for the study. Primary data were obtained from interviews while secondary data were obtained from publications of the Voter Education Project and the Fulton County Information Department.

Two methodological approaches were utilized in the survey. In the first approach, the five black Fulton County Commissioners (Michael Lomax, Reginald Eaves, Chuck Williams, Michael Hightower and Martin Luther King III) were interviewed in order to obtain general information on their role in the provision of services to blacks who live in Fulton County. Questions presented during the interview were on police, fire, hospitals, emergency medical services, child daycare, sanitation, parks and recreation, streets and housing services provided by the county. Studies by Brian Sherman and Farouk Brimah on the responsiveness of black southern congressional representatives to black concerns in June 1984, show that more than 75 percent of the black

population depends so much on these services.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, these services were among needs identified by blacks as presented by Bawden and Palmer.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, a total of 100 blacks who live in Fulton County were interviewed in order to determine their perception of service delivery since blacks gained a majority on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A. Availability sampling was used. The survey was conducted at the South Fulton Government Annex and at the Shannon Mall shopping center. The two locations were chosen for this survey because there are more blacks in South Fulton County than in North Fulton County. Only participants who confirmed that they were residents of Fulton County were surveyed. Respondents were asked questions about the same services that the commissioners were questioned on. The reason for this is to determine whether or not there are some contradictions about what the commissioners claimed they provided, and the perception of the respondents surveyed.

A Likert Scale was the major instrument used in analyzing the data for the study. The scale was used to determine the number of respondents who agree that the black commissioners are responsive to blacks who live in

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<sup>29</sup>Sherman and Brimah, The Responsiveness of Southern Black Political Leaders to Black Concerns, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup>Bawden and Palmer, "Social Policy: Challenging the Welfare State," p. 185.

the county, as well as the number who do not agree. For each of the service types covered in the survey, if the number of the respondents who agree that the commissioners are responsive is 70 percent or more, the commissioners will be deemed responsive in those service areas. If less than 70 percent agree, the commissioners will be deemed unresponsive.<sup>31</sup> A cut-off point of 70 percent used in this study was borrowed from a study by Sherman and Brimah of the Voter Education Project on evaluating the responsiveness of southern congressional representatives to black concerns. This study shows that a 70 percent or more increase in the delivery of services by the governing officials represents a reasonable amount of responsiveness.<sup>32</sup> This type of scale was also used by Michael Fitzgerald and Robert Durant in their study of citizen evaluation and urban management service delivery in 1980.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Sherman and Brimah, The Responsiveness of Southern Congressional Representatives to Black Concerns, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Fitzgerald and Robert Durant, "Citizens Evaluations and Urban Management: Service Delivery in an Era of Protest," Public Administration Review 40 (1980): 588.

## V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Commissioners' Perception of Their Responsiveness

Each of the five black county commissioners surveyed stated that he had common interests and commitments to blacks who live in the county.<sup>34</sup> Each claimed that he had constantly and persistently supported programs consistent with black needs in the county. Each of the commissioners stated that life has changed for the black man in the county relative to the time when white incumbents dominated the commission because most of the deterrent policies of the white administration have been modified. Each of the commissioners stated that blacks receive much better police protection than they did in the past. The commissioners felt that the response time to calls to the police and fire departments from residents has improved from seven minutes in 1975 to about three minutes in 1987. Medical services have also improved. The Chairman, Michael Lomax stated that the annual appropriation for Grady Hospital had more than doubled since the commission became majority black. In 1987,

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<sup>34</sup>The author held a number of face to face interviews with the black Fulton County commissioners over a period of five days (from 2nd to 7th February 1987). It was during these interviews that these views were expressed.



the five black commissioners adopted a resolution calling for four cents of every property tax dollar in the county to be used on health services.<sup>35</sup> Further, in 1987, following the initiative of Commissioner Reginald Eaves, the black commissioners adopted a resolution calling for 20 percent of every tax dollar to be spent on contracts and services to help blacks and other minority entrepreneurs.

Each of the commissioners interviewed stated that the county participates extensively in the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). The county has three appointees - two blacks and one white - to the MARTA Board of Directors. According to Michael Lomax, Chuck Williams and Reginald Eaves, a survey conducted in Fulton County by the Commission in 1986 shows that more than 75 percent of blacks ride on MARTA. Thus, in 1987, the five black commissioners, with the support of one white commissioner, adopted a resolution calling for an increase from 1 to 1.5 percent of every sales tax dollar that the county raises to be used for the support of MARTA.<sup>36</sup> Further, in 1987, the five black commissioners adopted a resolution calling for the modification of the affirmative action plan established by previous white commissioners Jerry White and H. T. Dotson, as their policies were detrimental to blacks. Commissioners

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<sup>35</sup>Interviews with the black Fulton County Commissioners, Atlanta, Georgia, February 2-7, 1987.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Chuck Williams, Michael Hightower, Martin L. King III and Reginald Eaves stated that their visits to different black neighborhoods showed that residents felt that the county commissioners are more accessible today than when there were more whites on the commission.<sup>37</sup> Each of the black commissioners stated that parks and recreational facilities, streets and sanitation services for blacks and other minorities have also improved.

The commissioners stated that they have participated in several housing programs to improve the poor housing conditions of low income blacks and other minorities. Such programs include the homeless task force, participation in private councils such as the Salvation Army, St. Judes and Christian Council of Metro Atlanta. However, each of the black commissioners stated that the county assumes full responsibility for the maintenance of roads and bridges in unincorporated Fulton County and that the county shares the cost of maintaining state roads with the State Department of Transportation.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the Chairman, Michael Lomax, stated that the commission has participated actively in the reduction of teenage pregnancies among blacks through the County Health Department, and Economic Opportunity Atlanta (EOA).

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

The feelings of the black commissioners are similar to those discussed in the literature review. As Harold Gosnell and William Keech found in their studies, black elected officials feel that they have been more responsive in the delivery of services than their white predecessors.

#### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents Surveyed

Seventy-five percent of the respondents surveyed for this study were males. The age range of the respondents was between eighteen and sixty-five. Annual income levels ranged from less than \$10,000 to over \$30,000 with 53 percent of the respondents earning between \$11,000 and \$30,000. The educational levels of the respondents ranged from less than twelve years of school to graduate education, with 44 percent having one to four years of college education. Forty-two percent of the respondents surveyed for this study live in unincorporated South Fulton, 27 percent in Atlanta, and 9 percent in Hapeville. Sixty-two percent of the respondents surveyed had lived in the county for a period of ten years.

#### Citizens' Perception of Responsiveness of Black County Commissioners

#### Contact with the Commissioners About Service Delivery

Twelve percent of the respondents surveyed in this study indicated that they had conferred with the county

commissioners about service-related matters. The twelve respondents were males between the ages of thirty-six and forty-five. Sixty-eight percent of these respondents have one to four years of college education, while 32 percent have graduate education. The respondents earn incomes of \$21,000 - \$30,000 per year. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents live in unincorporated South Fulton, while 33 percent live in the City of Atlanta. The twelve respondents had lived in the county between a period of six to ten years. They all agreed that the commissioners were responsive. Thus, it could be reasonable to say that black residents are satisfied with the services they receive since only 12 percent indicated that they made contacts with the commissioners about service-related matters.

#### Attitudes Towards Service Delivery

Table 1 summarizes attitude of the respondents towards service delivery. Item B in table 1 shows that 94 percent of the surveyed respondents felt that the commissioners were responsive to service delivery. However, Item 5 in table 1 shows that of the ten service areas about which the respondents were questioned, the commissioners did not fare well in the provision of housing for blacks and other minorities in the county. Therefore, the remainder of this section of the paper explores the extent to which the demographic characteristics of those respondents who disagree that improvements had been made.

TABLE 1

RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD RESPONSIVENESS  
OF THE COMMISSIONERS

Services	SA 5	A 4	SD 3	D 2	UD/DK 1	Totals
Since the number of blacks on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners has increased ... ,						
A. I get more out of my tax dollars.	60	33	0	2	5	100
1. There has been an improvement in the park and recreational facilities serving my neighborhood.	19	60	0	6	15	100
2. Police response to calls in my neighborhood has been much quicker.	60	29	0	6	5	100
3. Fire Dept. response to calls has been much quicker.	57	25	0	12	6	100
4. The sanitary conditions in my neighborhood have improved.	40	48	0	7	5	100
5. The housing condition of blacks in my neighborhood has improved.	10	17	19	34	20	100
6. The streets in my neighborhood are being taken care of much better.	20	59	2	17	2	100

Table 1 (Continued)

Services	SA 5	A 4	SD 3	D 2	UD/DK 1	Totals
7. Appropriations, renovation, and maintenance of Grady Hospital has improved.	74	59	2	17	2	100
8. The response time to calls of emergency medical services in my neighborhood has improved.	70	22	0	3	5	100
9. More facilities are now available in the daycare centers in my neighborhood.	46	36	0	8	10	100
B. In general, black commissioners are responsive to black needs.	58	36	0	2	4	100

Key: SA = Strongly Agree                      A = Agree  
       SD = Strongly Disagree                D = Disagree  
       UD/DK=Undecided or Don't Know

Note: These nine services were picked because they constitute the basic needs of the residents of Fulton County in which the black elected commissioners serve. The usual argument for tax increases in any community is the need to increase the quality of some of these services listed. Hence, it is only proper to evaluate the perception of the residents as to the quality of the services rendered.

Source: Data compiled from respondents to statements on the survey instrument administered (from 9th-13th February 1987).

Table 2 shows that a greater number of respondents who disagree that housing conditions did not improve since

the commission became predominantly black were respondents between the ages of twenty-six and forty-five. The reason could be that these respondents are more aware of the housing conditions that prevail in the county. Table 3 shows that respondents who have twelve or less years of education tend to disagree more about improvement in housing conditions than those with one to four years of college, or graduate education. The reason could be that respondents with college or graduate education belong to the middle and high income groups, and might not be affected by problems of poor housing conditions in the county. Table 4 shows that respondents who fell into the annual income range of \$10,000 or less tend to disagree more about improvement in housing conditions than respondents in higher income levels. The reason could be that these respondents do not have enough coping skills, and could not earn income that can provide them a decent accommodation. Table 5 shows that respondents who live in the City of Atlanta tend to disagree more about improvement in the housing conditions than respondents from other cities in the study. The reasons could be that the population of Atlanta is growing rapidly which might lead to high increase in rents. Moreover, it is envisaged that most residents who have housing problems tend to settle more in big cities where their conditions could be observed. Finally, table 6 shows that respondents who had lived in the county for a period of six to ten years tend to disagree more about

TABLE 2

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOUSING CONDITIONS  
BY AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Attitude	<u>Age of Respondents</u>						Total %
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65	
SA	2	3	4	0	2	0	10
A	8	3	4	1	1	0	17
SD	0	7	10	1	1	0	19
D	1	13	13	4	3	0	34
UD/DK	7	3	1	5	4	0	20
Total	17	29	32	11	11	0	100

TABLE 3

ATTITUDE TOWARDS HOUSING BY  
YEARS OF EDUCATION

Attitude	<u>Years of Education</u>			Totals
	12 Years or Less	1-4 Years College	Graduate Education	
SD	1	5	3	10
A	0	12	5	17
SD	12	4	3	19
D	17	11	6	34
UD/DK	2	11	7	20
Total	32	44	24	100



TABLE 4

ATTITUDES TOWARD HOUSING CONDITIONS  
BY INCOME LEVEL

Attitude	<u>Income Levels</u>				Total %
	10,000 or Less	11,000- 20,000	21,000- 30,000	Over 31,000	
SA	0	2	5	3	10
A	0	4	8	5	17
SD	17	2	0	0	19
D	19	9	4	2	34
UD/DK	1	10	9	0	20
Totals	37	27	26	10	100

TABLE 5

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOUSING CONDITIONS  
BY RESIDENCY

Attitude	<u>Residency</u>					Totals
	Unincorp. S. Fulton	Atl.	East Point	Col. Park	Hape- Ville	
SD	5	0	2	2	1	10
A	10	1	3	2	1	17
SD	4	9	0	3	3	19
D	8	13	5	5	3	34
UD/DK	15	4	0	0	1	20
Totals	42	27	10	12	9	100

TABLE 6

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOUSING CONDITIONS BY  
YEARS OF RESIDENCY IN THE COUNTY

Attitudes	<u>Years in County</u>				Total %
	Less than 1 Year	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	Over 10 Years	
SA	4	6	0	0	10
A	5	7	3	2	17
SD	1	2	9	7	13
D	0	4	18	12	34
UD/DK	3	6	6	5	20
Totals	13	25	36	26	100

Source: Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were compiled from answers provided in a questionnaire for this project. See sample of survey instrument administered and attached in Appendix A.

improvement in housing conditions. The reason could be that these respondents had live in the county for quite a long period of time, and can determine whether housing conditions had improved or not.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

Similar to the argument presented by writers such as Ronald Walter, Robert Smith, Martin Kilson, and William Keech, this study also supports the conclusion that black county commissioners are responsive to black needs in the county. Out of a total number of nine services used in the survey, the commissioners were found to be responsive on eight. Moreover, 94 percent of the residents surveyed feel that there had been some improvements in service delivery since blacks gained a majority on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. The interviews with five black commissioners show that one of the reasons why they have been active in the delivery of services to blacks is that they had succeeded in modifying some of the policies that did not take care of the basic needs of blacks before there were blacks on the commission. A good example of this is the modification of resource allocation. However, it is impressive that blacks have worked their way up in all levels of government. Blacks started to participate in the Fulton County Commission in 1974 and with their achievement so far, it is hoped that the commissioners will do more in the near future.

### Recommendations

A student of Public Administration should be concerned with the impact that elected officials have upon the delivery of services to residents within their electoral districts, since such elected officials are public administrators.

Because of the greater involvement of a wider range of groups, especially blacks in local politics in the State of Georgia, political power is becoming increasingly pluralistic in nature. Certainly, in larger counties such as Fulton County, policy making is no longer the sole prerogative of any one elite group as it used to be before the Civil Rights Act. Thus, this study suggests effective involvement of blacks in local and national politics in order to ensure policy making process strongly marked by bargaining, negotiation, and compromise between relevant interest and political actors.

Second, black citizens of Fulton County and throughout Georgia insist that government become more accountable to them. Indeed, accountability has become one of the watchwords of state and local governments. This suggestion is primarily important as a result of high increase of taxes which adversely affects the poor and low income groups.

Third, black involvement in local issues affects the distribution of a number of basic community services and

facilities. Hence the study suggests the potential incentive and the potential voting power to secure greater responsiveness from their current representatives or to replace them.

Additionally, improving services is impossible unless the officials collect reasonably good information on the level and quality of services that are currently available, or that the citizens contact the officials about the services they need. Thus, there should be effective citizens' administration relationship. The officials should take tours to different county neighborhoods at regular intervals, and the citizens must attend county meetings if the public is invited, in order to have the opportunities to air their problems.

Finally, the county should be more committed to housing, and, if possible, should give housing the highest priority in the annual appropriation. The county should put pressure on the federal government to increase the grants which they give to the county annually for housing. The county should encourage private organizations to participate in low housing projects.

If the number of blacks elected to public office should continue to grow, the voting power of the black electorate should also continue to grow. Hence, black residents of Fulton County as well as the U.S. as a whole should participate actively in the political process. Blacks should be

encouraged to read voter education publications and books in order to be more aware of public policy issues.

APPENDIX A  
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

# SURVEY INSTRUMENT

No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Felix Agoruah. I am a graduate student of Public Administration at the Atlanta University. I am conducting a survey to determine the perception of Black Fulton County residents in regards to county services they receive since Blacks have gained the majority on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. The results of the survey can be used to determine the influence of Black elected officials on the allocation of resources. I hope that you will allow me a few minutes of your time to answer the following questions.

A. Where do you live in the county?      Unincorporated      Hapeville  
    South Fulton      College Park  
    Atlanta  
    East Point      Other Municipalities

B. Have you ever contacted a Black      Yes      No  
    \_\_\_\_\_

C. If yes, did you feel that the Commissioner was responsive?      \_\_\_\_\_

Three of the seven Fulton County Commissioners have been Black for the past eight years. Since the Fall of 1986, five of the seven are Black. I am going to ask you a series of questions to see if you feel that having predominantly Black Commissioners has improved the quality of services received by Black residents of Fulton County. After I read each statement, please indicate whether or not you STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE, DISAGREE, or UNDECIDED/DO NOT KNOW.

SERVICES	SA	A	SD	D	UD/DK
	5	4	3	2	1

Since the number of Blacks on the Fulton County Board of Commissions has increased,

A. I get more out of my tax dollars.



SERVICES

SA A SD D UD/DK

1. There has been an improvement in the park and recreational facilities serving my neighborhood.
  2. Police response to calls in my neighborhood has been much quicker.
  3. The response time to calls of the Fire Department has been much quicker.
  4. The sanitary conditions of my neighborhood have improved.
  5. The housing conditions of Blacks in my neighborhood have improved.
  6. The streets in my neighborhood are being taken care of much better.
  7. Appropriation, renovation, and maintenance of Grady Hospital have improved.
  8. The response time to calls of emergency medical services in my neighborhood has improved.
  9. More facilities are now available in the daycare centers in my neighborhood.
- B. In general, Black Commissioners are responsive to Black needs.

What are two things that the Black County Commissioners should do to be more responsive to the needs of Black County residents?

A. Sex: Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_

B. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 18 - 25  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 26 - 35  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 36 - 45  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 46 - 55  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 56 - 65  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Over 65

C. How long have you lived in Fulton County?

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than one year

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 - 5 years

\_\_\_\_\_ 6 - 10 years

\_\_\_\_\_ Over 10 years

D. Do you own \_\_\_\_\_ rent \_\_\_\_\_ lease \_\_\_\_\_ your home?

What is your approximate income per year?

\_\_\_\_\_ 10,000 or less, \_\_\_\_\_ 11,000-20,000,

\_\_\_\_\_ 21,000-30,000, \_\_\_\_\_ Over 31,000

E. What level of education did you attain?

\_\_\_\_\_ 12 years or less, \_\_\_\_\_ 1-4 years of college,

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate Educ.

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